



## M E D I A R E L E A S E

January 18, 2016

### **Board Continues to Review Capital Plans**

Trustees and staff at District School Board Ontario North East are continuing to review the Board's Capital Plans. School boards across the Province are being challenged by the Ministry of Education to address issues of underutilized school space. In the 2015–2016 funding year, the Ministry of Education ceased to fund empty school space. In 2016, then Minister of Education Liz Sandals stated underutilized school space is costing the Province 1 billion dollars per year.

School boards have a fiduciary duty to produce balanced budgets. Failure by a school board to produce a balanced budget is not only illegal, it can result in the appointment of an administrator to make decisions for the school board. This has occurred several times in the past across the Province.

Boards across Ontario are forced to make difficult decisions which impact neighbourhoods and communities with the loss of their schools. At times this process has resulted in conflict between communities and neighbourhoods, as winners and losers are determined.

Over the past 6 years, District School Board Ontario North East has closed 5 elementary schools. Despite these closures, significant underutilized space remains.

District School Board Ontario North East created a strategic long term Capital Plan in the spring of 2015. This plan was vetted through the Ministry of Education. While no promises could be made, the plan was acknowledged to be very sound. Following the meeting with the Ministry, Board Trustees attended local council meetings and met with other stakeholder groups to describe the plan and obtain feedback. The board made a commitment to annually review the plan.

Given the failure of the Ministry to approve the first two capital items, the Board determined it was necessary to suspend further actions until the long range plan has been fully reviewed. *"Unfortunately, the Ministry's response to our submissions has left members confused as to which path to follow next"*, said Board Chair Doug Shearer.

*"When our plan was approved, we gave an undertaking that we would provide our community stakeholders with annual updates. Unfortunately, given an extremely slow decision making process on capital funding released by the Ministry, the Board was unable to thoroughly review the plan and again convey results to communities. Following the full*

**- MORE -**

**District School Board Ontario North East**

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*review and approval of a new plan, new meetings will be held with community stakeholders and councils.”*

“Unfortunately, the Board continues to have significant issues in relation to underutilized space. Without some meaningful change in policy or funding models, it is clear the Board will have no alternative but to consolidate more schools,” said Shearer.

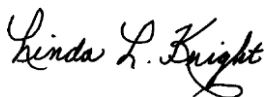
In 2016, the Auditor General for Ontario identified a 6 billion dollar shortfall in repair and funding maintenance across the Province. While some additional funding has been received, District School Board Ontario North East remains tens of millions of dollars behind in repair and maintenance money. Shearer added: *“The Board remains concerned that little will be gained by compacting students into schools that are already in need of significant repairs and upgrading while the Ministry refuses to commit to new, modernized facilities”.*

Another meeting is being scheduled for April to give Trustees and staff time consider options.

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